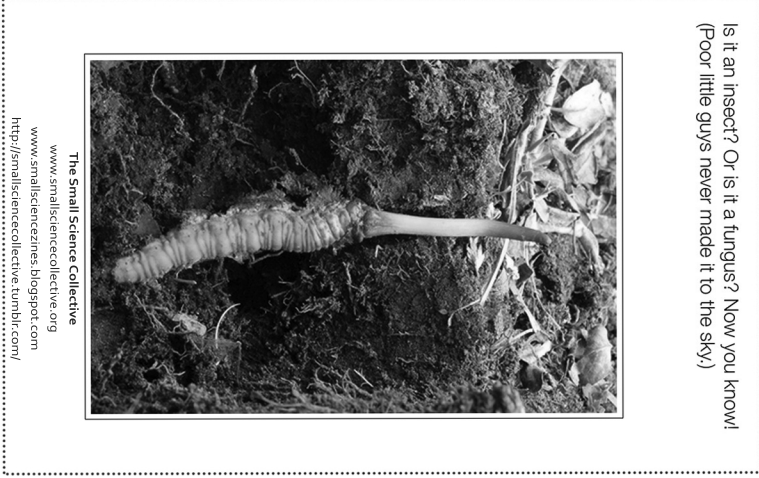


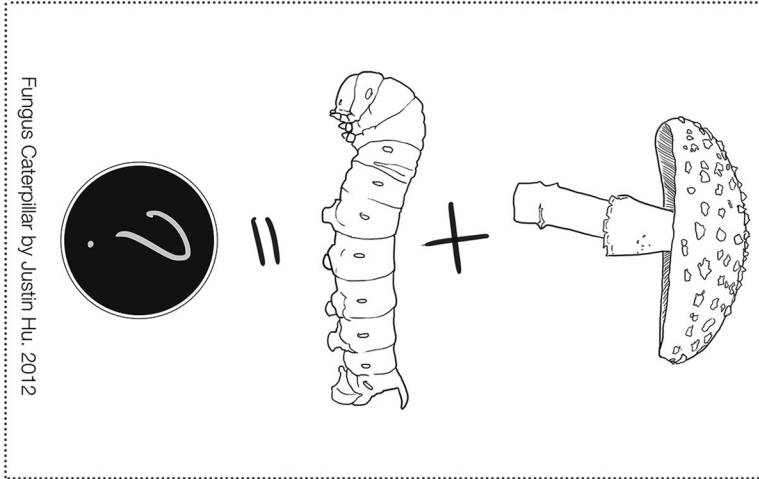


The Fungus Caterpillar is also known as the 'Tibetan Viagra' and contributes up to 40% of Tibet's domestic income. 1 kg of the fungus was valued at \$1,500 by 2002. Because of such lucrative rewards, the fungus has been overharvested in many parts of the Himalayas leaving barren lands. Territorial disputes also become violent as many families depend on this as a main source of income.

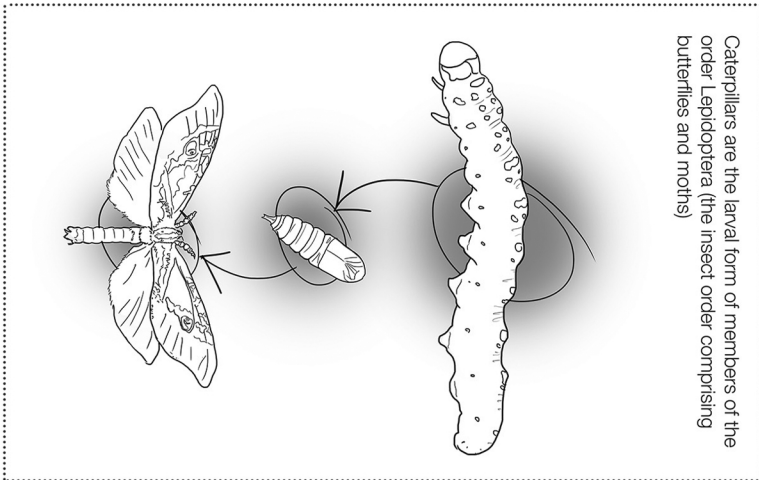
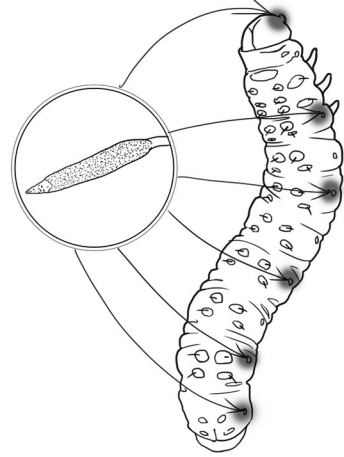
Medicinal use of the fungus caterpillar began in the 1400's in Tibet and China. They are believed to have aphrodisiacal effects, and are used as treatment for a variety of ailments from fatigue to cancer. Some research indicates anti-depressant effects and possible hypoglycemic effects which are beneficial for people with insulin resistance. Evidence also shows energizing effects through increased endurance in rats. They are usually consumed whole, or cooked in soups. While both the fungus and caterpillar part are edible, the latter contains most of the 'nutrients'.



The fungus invades the body of the caterpillars, filling its entire body cavity with mycelia, eventually killing and mummifying the host. The caterpillars die near the tops of their burrows. The dark brown to black fruiting body (or mushroom) emerges from the ground in spring or early summer, always growing out of the forehead of the caterpillar.



The Thitarodes caterpillar is attacked by the *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* (Caterpillar fungus) while feeding on roots. It is not certain how the fungus infects the caterpillar – possibly by ingestion of a fungal spore or by the fungus mycelium (the vegetative part of a fungus, consisting of a network of fine white filaments), invading the insect through one of the insect's breathing pores.



The caterpillars of the Ghost Moth (scientific name *Thitarodes*) are prone to infection by the fungus *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* (Caterpillar fungus) while feeding on roots. It is not certain how the fungus infects the caterpillar – possibly by ingestion of a fungal spore or by the fungus mycelium (the vegetative part of a fungus, consisting of a network of fine white filaments), invading the insect through one of the insect's breathing pores.

